

Bianchi, which has an extralimital distribution in central and eastern Tibet (Lhasa, Gyantse, Khamba Dzong), areas that adjoin Sikkim. Sálím Ali does not mention this owl in *BIRDS OF SIKKIM* (1962). This specimen, now deposited in the BNHS collection, confirms the hypothetical occurrence of the species in our range from North Sikkim. It may be worthwhile to emphasize that *Bubo bubo bengalensis*, which is much smaller

and darker, is also not yet recorded from Sikkim.

I thank the Sikkim Forest Department for enabling me to obtain this record.

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17. ON THE STATUS OF *HYPOCOLIUS AMPELINUS* BONAPARTE IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

The hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* Bonaparte (Family Bombycillidae) occurs in Afghanistan, S. Iran, Arabia and N. Africa where, in some areas, it is common and widespread. The *HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN* (Ali and Ripley 1972) describes the species as a rare vagrant, with individual examples seen and collected at long intervals in the Indian subcontinent. This opinion was supported by the fact that perhaps the first specimen was collected by Blanford on March 6, 1875 in the Larkana district, Pakistan followed by a record of Duke on April 20, 1877 in Kalat, Baluchistan (Pakistan). The *HANDBOOK* also mentions Sind (Karachi). It seems there were no further sightings of the hypocolius till Dr. Sálím Ali saw and procured a specimen from Kihim on November 14, 1930 (Ali 1931). Apart from this, there was also said to be a report of its occurrence in Madhya Pradesh. It was nearly thirty years later that a female and a male were collected in mist nets consecutively on March 22 and 23, 1960 at Kuar Bet on the southern edge of the Great Rann of Kutch (Shekar 1960). Apart from this, Dr. T.J. Roberts quotes Gen. Christon (pers. comm.) having come across a pair at Dalbadin in the Chagai (Pakistan) in 1942.

At the best of times, birds are unpredictable creatures changing their pattern of movement and distribution over a period of time. This fact is proved by the recent records

of occurrence of *Hypocolius ampelinus* on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan. Roberts (1992) refers to R. Passburg and himself having observed small parties of this species in the Hab valley (west of Karachi) between February 3 and March 6, 1984. This included a flock of 16 birds on February 17, 1984. Then Asad Ali and R. Passburg saw some numbers in 1986 and 1989 in the same location. But the most significant observation was that of Roberts himself, of 25 to 30 individuals at Zangi Nawar lake in the Chagai desert (Baluchistan) on May 1, 1985; they were going to roost in pairs, behaving excitedly and calling continuously.

S.N. Varu (SNV) accompanied by members of the local nature club was the first person to record the recent occurrence of the hypocolius in Kutch, a male in the vicinity of Chhari Dhandh on January 23, 1990 and one female the same day drinking water at the small village tank of Fulay. During the Bird Migration Study Project undertaken by the Bombay Natural History Society from January 1990 for two years, S. Asad Akhtar and J.K. Tiwari recorded the hypocolius and also captured and ringed a few individuals (details given in the Project Report). From 1992 to 1994, J.K. Tiwari made a more detailed study of the hypocolius at Fulay village under the BNHS Grasslands Ecology Project. The details of occurrences are given in Table 1.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

TABLE 1
RECORDS OF *HYPOCOLIUS AMPELINUS*
IN KUTCH FROM 1990-94

Location	Date	No. seen	Observed by
Chhari Dhandh	23.i.1990	1	SNV
Fulay village	23.i.1990	1	SNV
Fulay scrub	24.ii.1991	1	JKT
Fulay scrub	25.ii.1991	1	JKT
Fulay scrub	05.iii.1991	6	JKT
Fulay scrub	24.iii.1991	2	JKT
Fulay scrub	03.i.1992	1	JKT
Fulay scrub	13.ii.1993	3	JKT
Fulay scrub	06.iii.1993 (morning)	30	JKT
Fulay scrub	06.iii.1993 (evening)	44	JKT
Fulay scrub	02.iv.1993	4	Muhammad (BNHS local assistant)
Fulay scrub	09.xi.1993	12	JKT
Fulay scrub	12.xii.1993	45	JKT & SNV
Fulay scrub	13.xii.1993	50	JKT
Fulay scrub	20.xii.1993	150	JKT
Fulay scrub	26.xii.1993	4	JKT & MKH
Fulay scrub	27.i.1994	2	JKT
Laija creek (Mandvi)	06.ii.1994	1	JKT
Fulay scrub	10.ii.1994	1	JKT
Fulay scrub	19.3.1994	6	JKT
Fulay scrub	22.3.1994	16	JKT
Fulay scrub	07.iv.1994	1	JKT

The main sightings were made in the area adjacent to Fulay village, having sandy soil with thorny vegetation and ample food supply in the form of berries of *Salvadora persica*. This scrub jungle is situated between Fulay and Chhari villages. It has a dry water course, which runs from Chhari and passes through a greater part of this biotope. The predominant species of vegetation in this area are *Acacia nilotica* and *Salvadora persica*. *Hypocolius ampelinus* roost in *Acacia* and feed mainly on the ripe berries of *Salvadora*. After their morning activities, these birds, as observed by JKT, would suddenly fly up and disappear, presumably to a source of water.

This species has been seen more recently on various occasions as indicated in Table 2.

TABLE 2
RECENT RECORDS OF *HYPOCOLIUS AMPELINUS*
IN KUTCH

Location	Date	No. seen	Observed by
Lakhat	17.i.1997	1	JKT
Nr. Sindhodi (Abdasa)	1998	1	Kavi Tej
Pingleshwar (coastal dunes, Abdasa)	02.iii.1999	1	Kavi Tej & A. Pomal
Fulay scrub	29.iii.1999	11	JKT & SNV

From the regular sightings and increasing numbers of birds seen fairly regularly for a period of four years, coupled with the recent sightings, though sporadic, it could now safely be inferred that this species has extended its range of distribution and that it is more or less a regular visitor to Kutch. Fresh information from observers in Pakistan about occurrences of *Hypocolius ampelinus* in that country could certainly help us on this side of the border to arrive at more definite conclusions.

The semi-desert type scrub jungle near Fulay, in which the maximum numbers of hypocolius were observed, is in great danger of being cleared for agriculture and if steps are not soon taken to save this biotope, it will be lost for ever. This would also result in the destruction of one more habitat of the pied tit, *Parus nuchalis*, in Kutch, which has already disappeared from some of its former haunts.

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18. COMMENSAL FORAGING RELATIONSHIPS OF THE WHITE-BROWED FANTAIL*
RHIPIDURA AUREOLA IN MYANMAR

Flocking behaviour of birds in the non-breeding season is widely reported from the tropics. A number of reasons have been proposed for this behaviour. Several authors have observed that birds foraging in flocks benefit from the availability of arthropods flushed by flock mates (Belt 1874, Biddulph 1954, Moynihan 1962, Croxall 1976, MacDonald and Henderson 1977). However, other authors have found little evidence that the so-called "beater effect" (Powell 1985) is an important factor in promoting flocking behaviour (Willis 1972, Powell 1977, Greig-Smith 1978, King and Rappole 2001a).

Fantails are small, fly-catching passerines of the Family Pachycephalidae. Though some species of fantail do not appear to participate in mixed-species flocks, e.g. the Willy wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) (Cameron 1985) and the yellow-bellied fantail (*R. hypoxantha*) (Stevens 1904), other species of the group, such as the white-browed fantail (*R. aureola*) regularly participate in mixed-species foraging flocks during the non-breeding season. Cameron (1985) reported that grey fantails (*R. fuliginosa*) and rufous fantails (*R. rufifrons*) participating in mixed-species foraging flocks appear to forage on insects flushed by other flock members.

We studied the behaviour and movements of the white-browed fantail in mixed-species flocks in semi-deciduous forest in north central Myanmar, in an attempt to determine the basis for their participation in such groups.

This work is part of a long-term study of the birds of the north-central dry zone of Myanmar initiated in 1994, which is continuing. However,

most of these observations were collected from January 16-29, 1999 at Chatthin Wildlife Sanctuary (23° 43' N, 95° 31' E), located roughly 160 km north-northwest of Mandalay in Myanmar's Central Dry Zone. This sanctuary was established in 1941; it covers 268.2 sq. km (Salter and Sayer 1983) in which elevations range from 250-500 m. The climate is characterized by a rainy season (June-October), a cool dry season (November-February), and a hot dry season (March-May). The principal forest habitat at the sanctuary is Indaing, a Dry Deciduous Forest comprised of over 100 tree species, but dominated by *Dipterocarpus tuberculifer*. Indaing has a relatively open understorey of grasses and low shrubs maintained by regular, anthropogenic spring burning in March and April. Dominant trees in the forest lose their leaves in March at the height of the dry season, and leaf out again in June after monsoon arrives, at which time a lush, herbaceous understorey develops (Salter and Sayer 1983, McShea *et al.* 1999, Nay Myo Shwe *et al.* 1999).

Bird flocks were located by walking slowly (*c.* 1.5 km/hr) through the forest, watching for movement and listening for vocalization of common flock associates. Once a flock was located, it was followed as long as possible. Observations were conducted with the aid of 8 x 42 binoculars. Descriptions of the foraging behaviour and movements of flock members were written down or dictated into a hand-held tape recorder for later transcription.

*The white-browed fantail-flycatcher *Rhipidura aureola* is considered a member of Subfamily Rhipidurinae, see *Buceros* Vol 6(1), 2001. Published by: Bombay Natural History Society.